

Senate Bill 624

By: Senators Seabaugh of the 28th, Chance of the 16th, Harp of the 29th, Staton of the 18th, Seay of the 34th and others

AS PASSED SENATE

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED
AN ACT

To amend Code Section 15-6-2 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to the number of judges of superior court, so as to provide for a third judge of the superior courts of the Blue Ridge Judicial Circuit, a sixth judge of the superior courts of the Coweta Judicial Circuit, a third judge of the superior courts of the Houston Judicial Circuit, and a third judge of the superior courts of the Paulding Judicial Circuit; to provide for the appointment of such additional judges by the Governor; to provide for the election of successors to the judges initially appointed; to prescribe the powers of such judges; to prescribe the compensation, salary, and expense allowance of such judges to be paid by the State of Georgia and the counties comprising said circuits; to authorize the judges of such circuits to divide and allocate the work and duties thereof; to provide for the manner of impaneling jurors; to provide for an additional court reporter for such circuits; to authorize the governing authority of the counties that comprise such circuits to provide facilities, office space, supplies, equipment, and personnel for such judges; to declare inherent authority; to provide effective dates; to repeal conflicting laws; and for other purposes.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF GEORGIA:

Part I
SECTION 1-1.

Code Section 15-6-2 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to the number of judges of superior courts, is amended by striking paragraphs (6), (14), (21), and (31.1) and inserting their place new paragraphs to read as follows:

- "(6) Blue Ridge Circuit ~~2~~ 3"
- "(14) Coweta Circuit ~~5~~ 6"
- "(21) Houston Circuit ~~2~~ 3"
- "(31.1) Paulding Circuit ~~2~~ 3"

Part II**SECTION 2-1.**

One additional judge of the superior courts is added to the Blue Ridge Judicial Circuit, thereby increasing to three the number of judges of said circuit.

SECTION 2-2.

Said additional judge shall be appointed by the Governor for a term beginning January 1, 2007, and continuing through December 31, 2008, and until his or her successor is elected and qualified; such judge shall take office on the date of his or her appointment by the Governor. His or her successor shall be elected in the manner provided by law for the election of judges of the superior courts of this state at the nonpartisan judicial election in 2008, for a term of four years beginning on January 1, 2009, and until his or her successor is elected and qualified. Future successors shall be elected at the nonpartisan judicial election each four years after such election for terms of four years and until their successors are elected and qualified. They shall take office on the first day of January following the date of the election.

SECTION 2-3.

The additional judge of the superior courts of the Blue Ridge Judicial Circuit of Georgia shall have and may exercise all powers, duties, dignity, jurisdiction, privileges, and immunities of the present judges of the superior courts of this state. Any of the judges of the Blue Ridge Judicial Circuit may preside over any cause, whether in their own or in other circuits, and perform any official act as judge thereof, including sitting on appellate courts as provided by law.

SECTION 2-4.

The qualifications of such additional judge and his or her successors and his or her compensation, salary, and expense allowance from the State of Georgia and from the county comprising the Blue Ridge Judicial Circuit shall be the same as are now provided by law for all other superior court judges. The provisions, if any, enacted for the supplementation by the county of said circuit of the salary of the judges of the superior courts of the Blue Ridge Judicial Circuit shall also be applicable to the additional judge provided for by this Act.

SECTION 2-5.

All writs and processes in the superior courts of the Blue Ridge Judicial Circuit shall be returnable to the terms of said superior courts as they are now fixed and provided by law, or

1 as they may hereafter be fixed or determined by law, and all terms of said courts shall be held
2 in the same manner as though there were but one judge, it being the intent and purpose of this
3 Act to provide three judges equal in jurisdiction and authority to attend and perform the
4 functions, powers, and duties of the judges of said superior courts and to direct and conduct
5 all hearings and trials in said courts.

6 **SECTION 2-6.**

7 Upon and after qualification of the additional judge of the superior court of the Blue Ridge
8 Judicial Circuit, the three judges of said court may adopt, promulgate, amend, and enforce
9 such rules of practice and procedure in consonance with the Constitution and laws of the
10 State of Georgia as they deem suitable and proper for the effective transaction of the business
11 of the court; and, in transacting the business of the court and in performing their duties and
12 responsibilities, they shall share, divide, and allocate the work and duties to be performed by
13 each. In the event of a disagreement among the judges in respect hereof, the majority shall
14 rule, or failing a majority, the decision of the senior judge in point of service, who shall be
15 known as the chief judge, shall be controlling.

16 **SECTION 2-7.**

17 The drawing and impaneling of all jurors, whether grand, petit, or special, may be by any of
18 the judges of the superior court of said circuit; and they, or any one of them, shall have full
19 power and authority to draw and impanel jurors for service in said courts so as to have jurors
20 for the trial of cases before any of said judges separately or before each of them at the same
21 time.

22 **SECTION 2-8.**

23 The three judges of the Blue Ridge Judicial Circuit shall be authorized and empowered to
24 appoint an additional court reporter for such circuit, whose compensation shall be as now or
25 hereafter provided by law.

26 **SECTION 2-9.**

27 All writs, processes, orders, subpoenas, and any other official paper issuing out of the
28 superior courts of the Blue Ridge Judicial Circuit may bear teste in the name of any judge of
29 the Blue Ridge Judicial Circuit, and when issued by and in the name of any judge of said
30 circuit shall be fully valid and may be heard and determined before the same or any other
31 judge of said circuit. Any judge of said circuit may preside over any case therein and
32 perform any official act as judge thereof.

SECTION 2-10.

Upon request of any judge of the circuit, the governing authority of the county comprising the Blue Ridge Judicial Circuit is authorized to furnish the judges of said circuit with suitable courtrooms and facilities, office space, telephones, furniture, office equipment, supplies, and such personnel as may be considered necessary by the court to the proper function of the court. All of the expenditures authorized in this Act are declared to be an expense of the court and payable out of the county treasury as such.

Part III**SECTION 3-1.**

One additional judge of the superior courts is added to the Coweta Judicial Circuit, thereby increasing to six the number of judges of said circuit.

SECTION 3-2.

Said additional judge shall be appointed by the Governor for a term beginning January 1, 2007, and continuing through December 31, 2008, and until his or her successor is elected and qualified; such judge shall take office on the date of his or her appointment by the Governor. His or her successor shall be elected in the manner provided by law for the election of judges of the superior courts of this state at the nonpartisan judicial election in 2008, for a term of four years beginning on January 1, 2009, and until his or her successor is elected and qualified. Future successors shall be elected at the nonpartisan judicial election each four years after such election for terms of four years and until their successors are elected and qualified. They shall take office on the first day of January following the date of the election.

SECTION 3-3.

The additional judge of the superior courts of the Coweta Judicial Circuit of Georgia shall have and may exercise all powers, duties, dignity, jurisdiction, privileges, and immunities of the present judges of the superior courts of this state. Any of the judges of the Coweta Judicial Circuit may preside over any cause, whether in their own or in other circuits, and perform any official act as judge thereof, including sitting on appellate courts as provided by law.

SECTION 3-4.

1 The qualifications of such additional judge and his or her successors and his or her
2 compensation, salary, and expense allowance from the State of Georgia and from the
3 counties comprising the Coweta Judicial Circuit shall be the same as are now provided by
4 law for all other superior court judges. The provisions, if any, enacted for the
5 supplementation by the counties of said circuit of the salary of the judges of the superior
6 courts of the Coweta Judicial Circuit shall also be applicable to the additional judge provided
7 for by this Act.

8 **SECTION 3-5.**

9 All writs and processes in the superior courts of the Coweta Judicial Circuit shall be
10 returnable to the terms of said superior courts as they are now fixed and provided by law, or
11 as they may hereafter be fixed or determined by law, and all terms of said courts shall be held
12 in the same manner as though there were but one judge, it being the intent and purpose of this
13 Act to provide six judges equal in jurisdiction and authority to attend and perform the
14 functions, powers, and duties of the judges of said superior courts and to direct and conduct
15 all hearings and trials in said courts.

16 **SECTION 3-6.**

17 Upon and after qualification of the additional judge of the superior court of the Coweta
18 Judicial Circuit, the six judges of such circuit may adopt, promulgate, amend, and enforce
19 such rules of practice and procedure in consonance with the Constitution and laws of the
20 State of Georgia as they deem suitable and proper for the effective transaction of the business
21 of the court; and, in transacting the business of the court and in performing their duties and
22 responsibilities, they shall share, divide, and allocate the work and duties to be performed by
23 each. In the event of a disagreement among the judges in respect hereof, the majority shall
24 rule, or failing a majority, the decision of the senior judge in point of service, who shall be
25 known as the chief judge, shall be controlling. The six judges of the superior courts of the
26 Coweta Judicial Circuit shall have and are clothed with full power, authority, and discretion
27 to determine from time to time and term to term the manner of calling the dockets, fixing the
28 calendars, and order of business in such courts. They may assign to one of such judges the
29 hearing of trials by jury for a term and the hearing of all other matters not requiring a trial by
30 jury to the other judges, and they may rotate such order of business at the next term. They
31 may conduct trials by jury at the same time in the same county or otherwise within such
32 circuit, or they may hear chambers business and motion business at the same time at any
33 place within such circuit. They may provide in all respects for holding the superior courts
34 of such circuit so as to facilitate the hearing and determination of all the business of such

1 courts at any time pending and ready for trial or hearing. In all such matters relating to the
2 fixing, arranging for, and disposing of the business of such courts and making appointments
3 as authorized by law where the judges thereof cannot agree or shall differ, the opinion or
4 order of the chief judge as provided for in this Act shall control.

5 **SECTION 3-7.**

6 The drawing and impaneling of all jurors, whether grand, petit, or special, may be by any of
7 the judges of the superior court of said circuit; and they, or any one of them, shall have full
8 power and authority to draw and impanel jurors for service in said courts so as to have jurors
9 for the trial of cases before any of said judges separately or before each of them at the same
10 time.

11 **SECTION 3-8.**

12 The six judges of the Coweta Judicial Circuit shall be authorized and empowered to appoint
13 an additional court reporter for such circuit, whose compensation shall be as now or hereafter
14 provided by law.

15 **SECTION 3-9.**

16 All writs, processes, orders, subpoenas, and any other official paper issuing out of the
17 superior courts of the Coweta Judicial Circuit may bear teste in the name of any judge of the
18 Coweta Judicial Circuit and, when issued by and in the name of any judge of said circuit,
19 shall be fully valid and may be heard and determined before the same or any other judge of
20 said circuit. Any judge of said circuit may preside over any case therein and perform any
21 official act as judge thereof.

22 **SECTION 3-10.**

23 Upon request of any judge of the circuit, the governing authorities of the counties comprising
24 the Coweta Judicial Circuit are authorized to furnish the judges of such circuit with suitable
25 courtrooms and facilities, office space, telephones, furniture, office equipment, supplies, and
26 such personnel as may be considered necessary by the court to the proper function of the
27 court. All of the expenditures authorized in this Act are declared to be an expense of the
28 court and payable out of the county treasury as such.

29 **Part IV**

30 **SECTION 4-1.**

One additional judge of the superior courts is added to the Houston Judicial Circuit, thereby increasing to three the number of judges of said circuit.

SECTION 4-2.

Said additional judge shall be appointed by the Governor for a term beginning January 1, 2007, and continuing through December 31, 2008, and until his or her successor is elected and qualified; such judge shall take office on the date of his or her appointment by the Governor. His or her successor shall be elected in the manner provided by law for the election of judges of the superior courts of this state at the nonpartisan judicial election in 2008, for a term of four years beginning on January 1, 2009, and until his or her successor is elected and qualified. Future successors shall be elected at the nonpartisan judicial election each four years after such election for terms of four years and until their successors are elected and qualified. They shall take office on the first day of January following the date of the election.

SECTION 4-3.

The additional judge of the superior courts of the Houston Judicial Circuit of Georgia shall have and may exercise all powers, duties, dignity, jurisdiction, privileges, and immunities of the present judges of the superior courts of this state. Any of the judges of the Houston Judicial Circuit may preside over any cause, whether in their own or in other circuits, and perform any official act as judge thereof, including sitting on appellate courts as provided by law.

SECTION 4-4.

The qualifications of such additional judge and his or her successors and his or her compensation, salary, and expense allowance from the State of Georgia and from the county comprising the Houston Judicial Circuit shall be the same as are now provided by law for all other superior court judges. The provisions, if any, enacted for the supplementation by the county of said circuit of the salary of the judges of the superior courts of the Houston Judicial Circuit shall also be applicable to the additional judge provided for by this Act.

SECTION 4-5.

All writs and processes in the superior courts of the Houston Judicial Circuit shall be returnable to the terms of said superior courts as they are now fixed and provided by law, or as they may hereafter be fixed or determined by law, and all terms of said courts shall be held in the same manner as though there were but one judge, it being the intent and purpose of this

1 Act to provide three judges equal in jurisdiction and authority to attend and perform the
2 functions, powers, and duties of the judges of said superior courts and to direct and conduct
3 all hearings and trials in said courts.

4 **SECTION 4-6.**

5 Upon and after qualification of the additional judge of the superior court of the Houston
6 Judicial Circuit, the three judges of said court may adopt, promulgate, amend, and enforce
7 such rules of practice and procedure in consonance with the Constitution and laws of the
8 State of Georgia as they deem suitable and proper for the effective transaction of the business
9 of the court; and, in transacting the business of the court and in performing their duties and
10 responsibilities, they shall share, divide, and allocate the work and duties to be performed by
11 each. In the event of a disagreement among the judges in respect hereof, the majority shall
12 rule, or failing a majority, the decision of the senior judge in point of service, who shall be
13 known as the chief judge, shall be controlling.

14 **SECTION 4-7.**

15 The drawing and impaneling of all jurors, whether grand, petit, or special, may be by any of
16 the judges of the superior court of said circuit; and they, or any one of them, shall have full
17 power and authority to draw and impanel jurors for service in said courts so as to have jurors
18 for the trial of cases before any of said judges separately or before each of them at the same
19 time.

20 **SECTION 4-8.**

21 The three judges of the Houston Judicial Circuit shall be authorized and empowered to
22 appoint an additional court reporter for such circuit, whose compensation shall be as now or
23 hereafter provided by law.

24 **SECTION 4-9.**

25 All writs, processes, orders, subpoenas, and any other official paper issuing out of the
26 superior courts of the Houston Judicial Circuit may bear teste in the name of any judge of the
27 Houston Judicial Circuit, and when issued by and in the name of any judge of said circuit
28 shall be fully valid and may be heard and determined before the same or any other judge of
29 said circuit. Any judge of said circuit may preside over any case therein and perform any
30 official act as judge thereof.

31 **SECTION 4-10.**

1 Upon request of any judge of the circuit, the governing authority of the county comprising
2 the Houston Judicial Circuit are authorized to furnish the judges of said circuit with suitable
3 courtrooms and facilities, office space, telephones, furniture, office equipment, supplies, and
4 such personnel as may be considered necessary by the court to the proper function of the
5 court. All of the expenditures authorized in this Act are declared to be an expense of the
6 court and payable out of the county treasury as such.

7 **Part V**

8 **SECTION 5-1.**

9 One additional judge of the superior courts is added to the Paulding Judicial Circuit, thereby
10 increasing to three the number of judges of said circuit.

11 **SECTION 5-2.**

12 Said additional judge shall be appointed by the Governor for a term beginning January 1,
13 2007, and continuing through December 31, 2008, and until his or her successor is elected
14 and qualified; such judge shall take office on the date of his or her appointment by the
15 Governor. His or her successor shall be elected in the manner provided by law for the
16 election of judges of the superior courts of this state at the nonpartisan judicial election in
17 2008, for a term of four years beginning on January 1, 2009, and until his or her successor
18 is elected and qualified. Future successors shall be elected at the nonpartisan judicial
19 election each four years after such election for terms of four years and until their successors
20 are elected and qualified. They shall take office on the first day of January following the date
21 of the election.

22 **SECTION 5-3.**

23 The additional judge of the superior courts of the Paulding Judicial Circuit of Georgia shall
24 have and may exercise all powers, duties, dignity, jurisdiction, privileges, and immunities of
25 the present judges of the superior courts of this state. Any of the judges of the Paulding
26 Judicial Circuit may preside over any cause, whether in their own or in other circuits, and
27 perform any official act as judge thereof, including sitting on appellate courts as provided by
28 law.

29 **SECTION 5-4.**

30 The qualifications of such additional judge and his or her successors and his or her
31 compensation, salary, and expense allowance from the State of Georgia and from the county

1 comprising the Paulding Judicial Circuit shall be the same as are now provided by law for
2 all other superior court judges. The provisions, if any, enacted for the supplementation by
3 the county of said circuit of the salary of the judges of the superior courts of the Paulding
4 Judicial Circuit shall also be applicable to the additional judge provided for by this Act.

5 **SECTION 5-5.**

6 All writs and processes in the superior courts of the Paulding Judicial Circuit shall be
7 returnable to the terms of said superior courts as they are now fixed and provided by law, or
8 as they may hereafter be fixed or determined by law, and all terms of said courts shall be held
9 in the same manner as though there were but one judge, it being the intent and purpose of this
10 Act to provide three judges equal in jurisdiction and authority to attend and perform the
11 functions, powers, and duties of the judges of said superior courts and to direct and conduct
12 all hearings and trials in said courts.

13 **SECTION 5-6.**

14 Upon and after qualification of the additional judge of the superior court of the Paulding
15 Judicial Circuit, the three judges of said court may adopt, promulgate, amend, and enforce
16 such rules of practice and procedure in consonance with the Constitution and laws of the
17 State of Georgia as they deem suitable and proper for the effective transaction of the business
18 of the court; and, in transacting the business of the court and in performing their duties and
19 responsibilities, they shall share, divide, and allocate the work and duties to be performed by
20 each. In the event of a disagreement among the judges in respect hereof, the majority shall
21 rule, or failing a majority, the decision of the senior judge in point of service, who shall be
22 known as the chief judge, shall be controlling.

23 **SECTION 5-7.**

24 The drawing and impaneling of all jurors, whether grand, petit, or special, may be by any of
25 the judges of the superior court of said circuit; and they, or any one of them, shall have full
26 power and authority to draw and impanel jurors for service in said courts so as to have jurors
27 for the trial of cases before any of said judges separately or before each of them at the same
28 time.

29 **SECTION 5-8.**

30 The three judges of the Paulding Judicial Circuit shall be authorized and empowered to
31 appoint an additional court reporter for such circuit, whose compensation shall be as now or
32 hereafter provided by law.

SECTION 5-9.

All writs, processes, orders, subpoenas, and any other official paper issuing out of the superior courts of the Paulding Judicial Circuit may bear teste in the name of any judge of the Paulding Judicial Circuit, and when issued by and in the name of any judge of said circuit shall be fully valid and may be heard and determined before the same or any other judge of said circuit. Any judge of said circuit may preside over any case therein and perform any official act as judge thereof.

SECTION 5-10.

Upon request of any judge of the circuit, the governing authority of the county comprising the Paulding Judicial Circuit is authorized to furnish the judges of said circuit with suitable courtrooms and facilities, office space, telephones, furniture, office equipment, supplies, and such personnel as may be considered necessary by the court to the proper function of the court. All of the expenditures authorized in this Act are declared to be an expense of the court and payable out of the county treasury as such.

Part VI**SECTION 6-1.**

Nothing in this Act shall be deemed to limit or restrict the inherent powers, duties, and responsibilities of superior court judges provided by the Constitution and statutes of the State of Georgia.

SECTION 6-2.

(a) For purposes of making the initial appointment of the judge to fill the superior court judgeships created by this Act, this Act shall become effective upon its approval by the Governor or upon its becoming law without such approval.

(b) For all other purposes, Parts II, III, IV, and V of this Act shall become effective January 1, 2007.

(c) For all other purposes, Parts I and VI of this Act shall become effective upon this Act's approval by the Governor or upon its becoming law without such approval.

SECTION 6-3.

All laws and parts of laws in conflict with this Act are repealed.